THE VIRGIN-BIRTH OF OUR LORD

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THE VIRGIN-BIRTH OF OUR LORD

A PAPER READ (IN SUBSTANCE)
BEFORE THE CONFRATERNITY OF THE HOLY TRINITY
AT CAMBRIDGE

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BY

B. W. RANDOLPH, D.D.

PRINCIPAL OF ELY THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE
HON. CANON OF ELY
EXAMINING CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN

Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem : non horruisti Virginis uterum.

SECOND EDITION

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.
39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA
1907

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WITH

RESPECT AND AFFECTION

TO

VINCENT HENRY STANTON, D.D.

ELY PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY

IN THE

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Dedisti Jesum Christum, Filium tuum unicum, ut . . . pro nobis nasceretur qui, operante Spiritu Sancto, verus Homo factus est ex substantia Virginis Mariæ matris suæ.

Præf. in Die Nat. Dom.

PREFACE

THIS paper was read before the S. T. C.[1] on March 10th of this year, at one of the ordinary meetings of the Brotherhood. It is published now in the hope that it may thus reach a wider circle.

To suppose that any one can hold the Catholic doctrine of the Incarnation without believing the miraculous Conception and Birth, is, in the writer's opinion, a delusion. There is no trace in Church History, so far as he is aware, of any believers in the Incarnation who were not also believers in the Virgin-Birth. The modern endeavour to divorce the one from the other

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[1] Sanctae Trinitatis Confraternitas.

appears to be part of the attempt now being made to get rid of the miraculous altogether from Christianity.

Professor Harnack appears to urge us to accept the "Easter message" while we need not, he thinks, believe the "Easter faith."[1] He means apparently by this that we can deny the literal fact of our Lord's Resurrection, while we may believe in a future life. What St. Paul would really have said to a Christianity such as this seems to be plain from his words to the Corinthian converts who were denying the Resurrection in his day: "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."[2]

Deny the Resurrection of our Lord, and you take away the key-stone from the Apostolic preaching, and the whole edifice falls to the ground. Any unprejudiced reader of the

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[1] Harnack, *What is Christianity?* p. 160.

[2] 1 Cor. xv. 14.

sermons and speeches of St. Peter and St. Paul in the Acts will surely recognize how true this is.

Similarly in regard to the human Birth of our Lord. Once admit that He was born as other men, and the Incarnation fades away. A child born naturally of human parents can never be God Incarnate. There can be no new start given to humanity by such a birth. The entail of original sin would not be cut off, nor could the Christ so born be described as the "Second Adam—the Lord from heaven." Christians could not look to such a one as their Redeemer or Saviour, still less as the Author to them of a new spiritual life.

Another man would have appeared among men, giving mankind the example of a beautiful human life, but unable in any other way to benefit the race of men. Further, a Christ such as this would not be a perfect character, for if the Gospels are to be believed, He said things about Himself and made claims

which no thoroughly good man could have a right to make unless he were immeasurably more than man.

While these pages were passing through the press, the eye of the present writer was caught by the following words in a letter of Bishop Westcott, which seem to have a special significance at this time:—"I tried vainly to read ——'s book. . . . He seems to me to deny the Virgin-Birth. In other words, he makes the Lord a man, one man in the race, and not the new Man—the Son of Man, in whom the race is gathered up. To put the thought in another and a technical form, he makes the Lord's personality human, which is, I think, a fatal error."[1]

It is sometimes said, in opposition to the mystery of the Virgin-Birth, that there is a tendency in the human mind, not without its illustrations in history, to "decorate with

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[1] *Life of Bishop Westcott*, vol. ii. p. 308.

legend" the early history of great men. In reply, it may be enough here to say that legends analogous to the pagan legends of the births of heroes, false and absurd legends, did gather round the infancy of Jesus Christ. The Apocryphal Gospels are full of such legends. They tell us how the idols of Egypt fell down before Him; how His swaddling-clothes worked miracles; and how He made clay birds and turned boys into kids, and worked other absurd miracles of various kinds. But there is a world of difference between these "silly tales" and the restraint, purity, dignity, and reserve which characterize the narratives of the first and third Evangelists. "The distinction between history and legend," says Dr. Fairbairn, "could not be better marked than by the reserve of the Canonical and the vulgar tattle of the Apocryphal Gospels."[1]

I wish to take this opportunity of thanking

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[1] Quoted in Gore, *Dissertations*, p. 60.

my colleague, the Rev. G. W. Douglas, and my friend the Rev. Canon Warner, Rector of Stoke-by-Grantham, for their kind help in revising the proof-sheets of this paper.

B. W. R.

THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE,
ELY,
Feast of St. Mark, 1903.

THE VIRGIN-BIRTH OF OUR LORD

THERE are two miracles confessed in every form of the Creed—the miracle of the Conception and Birth, by which the Incarnation was effected; and the miracle of the Resurrection. These are the fundamental miracles, and are the battle-ground upon which the defenders and assailants of Christianity more especially meet.

The discussion of this most sacred subject of the Virgin-Birth of our Lord has been forced upon us at the present time. It is impossible to ignore it or set it aside. We must be prepared, each of us, however much we may shrink from treading on such sacred

ground, to give a reason for the hope that is in us with reverence and fear.

I will ask you here and now to consider the matter briefly under four heads. First, I will try to give the evidence for the belief in this article of the Creed during the second century; next, I will ask you to consider the evidence of St. Matthew and St. Luke; thirdly, we will consider the argument *e silentio* on the other side; and lastly, I will ask you to reflect on the theological aspect of the question.

I

THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

I WILL therefore, without any further preface, plunge into the middle of the subject, and ask you, first of all, to consider afresh that 'throughout the Church the statement of the belief in the Virgin-Birth had its place from so early a date, and is traceable along so many different lines of evidence, as to force upon us the conclusion that, before the death of the last Apostle, the Virgin-Birth must have been among the rudiments of the Faith in which every Christian was initiated;' that if we believe the Divine guidance in the Church at all, we must needs believe that this mystery was part of "the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints."

Bear with me, then, while I go over the evidence of the leading witnesses.

1. St. Ignatius.

He must have become Bishop of Antioch quite early in the second century. As he passes through Asia about the year 110, he is on his way to martyrdom, and in his Epistles he speaks emphatically of the Virgin-Birth.

In the Epistle to the *Ephesians*, he says: "Hidden from the prince of this world were the Virginity of Mary and her child-bearing, and likewise also the death of our Lord—three mysteries of open proclamation, the which were wrought in the silence of God."[1]

In the Epistle to the *Smyrnaeans*, he says: "I give glory to Jesus Christ, the God who

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[1] *Eph.*, 19. "Καὶ ἔλαθεν τὸν ἄρχοντα τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου ἡ παρθενία Μαρίας καὶ ὁ τοκετὸς αὐτῆς, ὁμοίως καὶ ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Κυρίου· τρία μυστήρια κραυγῆς, ἅτινα ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ Θεοῦ ἐπράχθη."

bestowed such wisdom upon you; for I have perceived that ye are established in faith immovable . . . firmly persuaded as touching our Lord, that He is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, but Son of God by the Divine will and power, truly born of a Virgin, and baptized by John . . . truly nailed up for our sakes in the flesh, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the tetrarch." [1]

In his Epistle to the *Trallians*, he writes: "Be ye deaf, therefore, when any man speaketh to you apart from Jesus Christ, who was of

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[1] *Smyrn.*, 1. "Δοξάζω Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν τὸν Θεὸν τὸν οὕτως ὑμᾶς σοφίσαντα· ἐνόησα γὰρ ὑμᾶς κατηρτισμένους ἐν ἀκινήτῳ πίστει . . ., πεπληροφορημένους εἰς τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν ἀληθῶς ὄντα ἐκ γένους Δαυεὶδ κατὰ σάρκα, υἱὸν Θεοῦ κατὰ θέλημα καὶ δύναμιν Θεοῦ, γεγενημένον ἀληθῶς ἐκ παρθένου, βεβαπτισμένον ὑπὸ Ἰωάννου . . . ἀληθῶς ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου καὶ Ἡρώδου τετράρχου καθηλωμένον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐν σαρκί."

the race of David, who was the Son of Mary, who was truly born."[1]

2. Aristides of Athens.

In his *Apology*, written about the year 130, mentioning the Virgin-Birth as an integral portion of the Catholic Faith, he writes: "The Christians trace their descent from the Lord Jesus Christ; now He is confessed by the Holy Ghost to be the Son of the Most High God, having come down from heaven for the salvation of men, and having been born of a holy Virgin[2] . . . He took flesh, and appeared to men."[3]

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[1] *Trall.*, 9. "Κωφώθητε οὖν, ὅταν ὑμῖν χωρὶς Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ λαλῇ τις, τοῦ ἐκ γένους Δαυείδ, τοῦ ἐκ Μαρίας, ὃς ἀληθῶς ἐγεννήθη."

[2] Another reading here is "a Hebrew Virgin," and the Armenian recension has the name "Mary." See Hahn, *Bibliothek der Symbole*, p. 4; and Harnack's Appendix to the same work, p. 376

[3] *Apol.*, ch. xv. The quotation is from the

3. Justin Martyr.

In his *Apologies* and in his *Dialogue with Trypho* he has three summaries of the Christian Faith, in all of which the Virgin-Birth, the Crucifixion, the Death, the Resurrection, and the Ascension are the chief points of belief about Christ.

In his *First Apology* (written between 140 and 150) he says: "We find it foretold in the Books of the Prophets that Jesus our Christ should come born of a Virgin . . . be crucified

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Greek text preserved in the *History of Barlaam and Josaphat.* See *The Remains of the Original Greek of the Apology of Aristides*, by J. Armitage Robinson. *Texts and Studies* (Cambridge, 1891), vol. i. pp. 78, 79, 110.

"Οἱ δὲ Χριστιανοὶ γενεαλογοῦνται ἀπὸ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, οὗτος δὲ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου ὁμολογεῖται ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ καταβὰς διὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων· καὶ ἐκ παρθένου ἁγίας γεννηθεὶς . . . σάρκα ἀνέλαβε, καὶ ἀνεφάνη ἀνθρώποις."

and should die and rise again, and go up to Heaven, and should both be and be called the 'Son of God.'"[1] And a little later in the same work he says: "He was born as man of a Virgin, and was called Jesus, and was crucified, and died, and rose again, and has gone up into heaven."[2]

In his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (written after the *First Apology*) he says: "For through the name of this very Son of God, who is also the First-born of every creature, and who was born of a Virgin, and made a man subject to

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[1] *Apol.*, i. 31. "Ἐν δὴ ταῖς τῶν προφητῶν βίβλοις εὕρομεν προκηρυσσόμενον παραγινόμενον γεννώμενον διὰ παρθένου . . . σταυρούμενον Ἰησοῦν τὸν ἡμέτερον Χριστόν, καὶ ἀποθνήσκοντα, καὶ ἀνεγειρόμενον, καὶ εἰς οὐρανοὺς ἀνερχόμενον, καὶ υἱὸν Θεοῦ ὄντα καὶ κεκλημένον."

[2] *Apol.*, i. 46. "Διὰ παρθένου ἄνθρωπος ἀπεκυήθη, καὶ Ἰησοῦς ἐπωνομάσθη, καὶ σταυρωθεὶς καὶ ἀποθανὼν ἀνέστη, καὶ ἀνελήλυθεν εἰς οὐρανόν."

suffering, and was crucified by your nation in the time of Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, every evil spirit is exorcised and overcome and subdued."[1]

4. St. Irenaeus.

Writing not later than 190, he makes constant reference to the Virgin-Birth as an integral portion of the Faith of Christendom. He says: "The Church, though scattered over the whole world to the ends of the earth, yet having received from the Apostles and their disciples the Faith—

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[1] *Dial.*, 85. "Κατὰ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ τούτου τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ πρωτοτόκου πάσης κτίσεως, καὶ διὰ παρθένου γεννηθέντος καὶ παθητοῦ γενομένου ἀνθρώπου, καὶ σταυρωθέντος ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ ὑμῶν καὶ ἀποθανόντος καὶ ἀναστάντος ἐκ νεκρῶν, καὶ ἀναβάντος εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, πᾶν δαιμόνιον ἐξορκιζόμενον νικᾶται καὶ ὑποτάσσεται."

> In one God the Father Almighty . . . and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was incarnate for our salvation: and in the Holy Ghost, who by the Prophets announced His dispensations and His comings; and the birth of the Virgin (καὶ τὴν ἐκ Παρθένου γέννησιν), and the Passion, and Resurrection from the dead, and the bodily assumption into heaven of the beloved Jesus Christ our Lord, and His appearance from heaven in the glory of the Father . . .

having received, as we said, this preaching and this Faith, the Church, though scattered over the whole world, guards it diligently, as inhabiting one house, and believes in accordance with these words as having one soul and the same heart; and with one voice preaches and teaches and hands on these things, as if possessing one mouth. For the languages of the world are unlike, but

the force of the tradition is one and the same."[1]

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[1] *Contra Haeres.*, I. x. 1, 2. "Ἡ μὲν γὰρ Ἐκκλησία, καίπερ καθ' ὅλης τῆς οἰκουμένης ἕως περάτων τῆς γῆς διεσπαρμένη, παρὰ δὲ τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν ἐκείνων μαθητῶν παραλαβοῦσα τὴν εἰς ἕνα Θεὸν Πατέρα παντοκράτορα . . . πίστιν· καὶ εἰς ἕνα Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν σαρκωθέντα ὑπὲρ τῆς ἡμετέρας σωτηρίας· καὶ εἰς Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον, τὸ διὰ τῶν προφητῶν κεκηρυχὸς τὰς οἰκονομίας, καὶ τὰς ἐλεύσεις, καὶ τὴν ἐκ Παρθένου γέννησιν, καὶ τὸ πάθος, καὶ τὴν ἔγερσιν ἐκ νεκρῶν, καὶ τὴν ἔνσαρκον εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἀνάληψιν τοῦ ἠγαπημένου Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν, καὶ τὴν ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ τοῦ Πατρὸς παρουσίαν. . . .

"Τοῦτο τὸ κήρυγμα παρειληφυῖα καὶ ταύτην τὴν πίστιν, ὡς προέφαμεν, ἡ Ἐκκλησία, καίπερ ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ κόσμῳ διεσπαρμένη, ἐπιμελῶς φυλάσσει, ὡς ἕνα οἶκον οἰκοῦσα· καὶ ὁμοίως πιστεύει τούτοις, ὡς μίαν ψυχὴν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔχουσα καρδίαν, καὶ συμφώνως ταῦτα κηρύσσει καὶ διδάσκει, καὶ παραδίδωσιν, ὡς ἓν στόμα κεκτημένη, καὶ γὰρ αἱ κατὰ τὸν κόσμον διάλεκτοι

He goes on to say that in this Faith agree the Churches of Germany, Spain, Gaul, the East, Egypt, Libya, and Italy. His words are: "No otherwise have the Churches established in Germany believed and delivered, nor those in Spain, nor those among the Celts, nor those in the East, nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor those established in the central parts of the earth."[1]

Again, in the same work we read of the many races of Barbarians "who believe in Christ . . . believe in one God, the Framer of heaven and earth and of all things that are in them, by Christ Jesus the Son of God, who for His surpassing love's sake towards His

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ἀνόμοιαι, ἀλλ' ἡ δύναμις τῆς παραδόσεως μία καὶ ἡ αὐτή."

[1] *Contra Haeres.*, I. x. 2. "Καὶ οὔτε αἱ ἐν Γερμανίαις ἱδρυμέναι Ἐκκλησίαι ἄλλως πεπιστεύκασιν, ἢ ἄλλως παραδιδόασιν, οὔτε ἐν ταῖς Ἰβηρίαις, οὔτε ἐν Κελτοις, οὔτε κατὰ τὰς ἀνατολὰς, οὔτε ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ, οὔτε ἐν Λιβύῃ, οὔτε αἱ κατὰ μέσα τοῦ κόσμου ἱδρυμέναι."

creatures, submitted to the birth which was of the Virgin, Himself by Himself uniting man to God."[1]

5. Tertullian.

His writings represent the teaching of the Churches of Rome and Carthage, and, writing a little later than Irenaeus (c. 200), he assures us again and again that the Virgin-Birth is an integral portion of the Catholic Faith. "The rule of faith," he says, "is altogether one, alone firm and unalterable; the rule, that is, of believing in One God Almighty, the Maker of

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[1] *Contra Haeres.*, III. iv. 1, 2. "Qui in Christum credunt . . . in unum Deum credentes, Factorem coeli et terrae, et omnium quae in eis sunt, per Iesum Christum Dei Filium; qui propter eminentissimam erga figmentum Suum dilectionem, eam quae esset ex Virgine generationem sustinuit, ipse per se hominem adunans Deo."

the world; and His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate." [1]

"Now the rule of faith . . . is that whereby it is believed that there is in any wise but one God, who by His own Word first of all sent forth, brought all things out of nothing; that this Word called His Son, was . . . brought down at last by the Spirit and the power of God the Father into the Virgin Mary, made flesh in her womb, and was born of her." [2]

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[1] *De Virg. Veland.*, 1. "Regula quidem fidei una omnino est, sola immobilis et irreformabilis, credendi scilicet, in unicum Deum Omnipotentem, mundi Conditorem; et Filium ejus Jesum Christum, natum ex Virgine Maria, crucifixum sub Pontio Pilato."

[2] *De Praescript. Haeret.*, cap. xiii. "Regula est autem fidei, . . . illa scilicet qua creditur: Unum omnino Deum esse qui universa de nihilo produxerit per Verbum suum primo omnium demissum; id Verbum, Filium ejus

Again, speaking of the Trinity, he writes that the Word, "by whom all things were made, and without whom nothing was made, was sent by the Father into a Virgin, was born of her—God and Man—Son of man, Son of God, and was called Jesus Christ." [1]

6. Clement.

Clement about the year 190, and Origen about 230, represent the great Church of Alexandria. Their testimony to the place which the Virgin-Birth holds in the Church is clear and unhesitating. Clement speaks of the whole dispensation as consisting in this, "that

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appellatum. . . . postremo delatum ex Spiritu Patris Dei et virtute, in Virginem Mariam, carnem factum in utero eius, et ex ea natum."

[1] *Adv. Prax.*, cap. ii. "Per quem omnia facta sunt, et sine quo factum est nihil. Hunc missum a Patre in Virginem, et ex ea natum, Hominem et Deum, Filium hominis et Filium Dei, et cognominatum Jesum Christum."

the Son of God who made the universe took flesh and was conceived in the womb of a Virgin . . . and suffered and rose again."[1]

7. Origen.

In the *De Principiis*, Origen writes: "The particular points clearly delivered in the teaching of the Apostles are as follows: First, that there is one God, . . . then that Jesus Christ Himself who came [into the world] was born of the Father before all creation; that after He had been the minister of the Father in the creation of all things—*for by Him were all things made*—in the last times, emptying Himself He became man and was incarnate, although

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[1] *Strom.*, vi. 15. 127. "Ἤδη δὲ καὶ ἡ οἰκονομία πᾶσα ἡ περὶ τοῦ Κυρίου προφητευθεῖσα, παραβολὴ ὡς ἀληθῶς φαίνεται τοῖς μὴ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἐγνωκόσιν, ὅτ' ἄν τις τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοῦ τὰ πάντα πεποιηκότος, σάρκα ἀνειληφότα, καὶ ἐν μήτρᾳ παρθένου κυοφορηθέντα . . . πεπονθότα καὶ ἀνεσταμένον λέγει."

He was God, and being made man He remained that which He was, God. He assumed a body like our own, differing in this respect only, that it was born of a Virgin and of the Holy Spirit." [1]

In his *Treatise against Celsus* he exclaims: "Who has not heard of the Virgin-Birth of Jesus, of the Crucified, of His Resurrection of which so many are convinced,

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[1] *De Principiis*, Lib. I., Pref., 4. "Species vero eorum quae per praedicationem apostolicam manifeste traduntur, istae sunt, Primo, quod unus Deus est . . . : tum deinde quia Jesus Christus ipse qui venit, ante omnem creaturam natus ex Patre est. Qui cum in omnium conditione Patri ministrasset (per ipsum enim omnia facta sunt); novissimis temporibus se ipsum exinaniens, homo factus incarnatus est, cum Deus esset, et homo factus mansit quod erat, Deus. Corpus assumsit nostro corpori simile, eo solo differens, quod natum ex Virgine et Spiritu Sancto est."

and the announcement of the judgment to come?"[1]

Think for a moment what all this agreement—this consensus of tradition implies. The testimony of these writers clearly shows that in the early part of the second century, and reaching back to its very beginning, the Virgin-Birth formed part of the tradition or doctrinal creed of the Church, and that this tradition was believed to be traced back to the Apostles. It has a place in the earliest forms of the Creed: it is insisted upon by the earliest Apologists. It is not merely in one Church or two Churches, in one district or in two, that this tradition is found. It is everywhere. In East and West alike. It is so in Rome and in Gaul (by the testimony of

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[1] *Contr. Celsum*, i. 7. "Τίνι γὰρ λανθάνει ἡ ἐκ παρθένου γέννησις Ἰησοῦ καὶ ὁ ἐσταυρωμένος καὶ ἡ παρὰ πολλοῖς πεπιστευμένη ἀνάστασις αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἡ καταγγελλομένη κρίσις;"

Irenaeus). It is in Greece (by the testimony of Aristides). It is in Africa (by the testimony of Tertullian); in Alexandria (by the testimony of Clement and Origen); in Asia (by the testimony of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Ignatius); in Palestine and Syria (by the testimony of Ignatius and Justin Martyr). Irenaeus, if any one, should know what the Apostles taught, for before he came to Rome he had been the pupil of Polycarp in Asia, who had himself sat at the feet of St. John.

"Everything that we know," says Mr. Rendel Harris, "of the Dogmatics of the early part of the second century agrees with the belief that at that period the Virginity of Mary was a part of the formulated Christian belief."[1] How could the belief in the Virgin-Birth have taken such undisputed possession of so many widely

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[1] See *Texts and Studies* (Cambridge, 1891), vol. i. No. 1, p. 25.

separated and independent Churches unless it had had Apostolic authority?[1] What other explanation can be given for the fact? There is as complete a consensus of tradition as could reasonably be asked for. It is impossible to imagine that the doctrine of the Virgin-Birth can have been suddenly evolved in the early years of the second century. The only adequate explanation is that it was a substantial part of the Apostolic tradition. It may be worth while here to quote the words of so distinguished a scholar as Professor Zahn, of Erlangen.

"This [the Virgin-Birth] has been an element of the Creed as far as we can trace it back; and if Ignatius can be taken as a witness of a Baptismal Creed springing from early Apostolic times, certainly in that Creed

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[1] "Ecquid verisimile est, ut tot ac tantae [ecclesiae] in unam fidem erraverint?"—Tertullian, *De Praescript.*, cap. xxviii.

the name of the Virgin Mary already had its place. . . . We may further assert that during the first four centuries of the Church, no teacher and no religious community which can be considered with any appearance of right as an heir of original Christianity, had any other notion of the beginning of the [human] life of Jesus of Nazareth. . . . The theory of an original Christianity without the belief in Jesus the Son of God, born of the Virgin, is a fiction." [1]

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[1] "Dies aber ist ein Element des Symbolum gewesen, so weit wir dasselbe zurückverfolgen können ; und wenn Ignatius als Zeuge für ein noch älteres, aus früher apostolischer Zeit stammendes Taufbekenntnis gelten darf, so hat auch in diesem bereits der Name der Jungfrau Maria seine Stelle gehabt . . . Man darf ferner behauften, dass während der ersten vier Jahrhunderte der Kirche kein Lehrer und Keine religiöse Genossenschaft, welche sich mit einigem Schein des Rechts als Erben des

Opponents of the Virgin-Birth occur, indeed, in the person of Cerinthus, the contemporary of St. John, and later on among the Ebionites, mentioned by Justin Martyr.[1] But they reject the Virgin-Birth, because they reject the principle of the Incarnation. "There are no believers in the Incarnation discoverable who are not believers in the Virgin-Birth."[2] The two truths have been held together as inseparable. There has never been any belief in the Incarnation without its carrying with it the belief in the Virgin-Birth.

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ursprünglichen Christenthums betrachten konnten, eine andere Auschauung von dem Lebensanfang Jesu von Nazareth gehabt haben, als diese. . . . Dass die Annahme eines ursprünglichen Christenthums ohne den Glauben an den von der Jungfrau geborenen Gottessohn Jesus eine Fiktion ist."—Zahn, *Das Apostolische Symbolum*, pp. 55–68.

[1] *Dial. cum Tryph.*, 48, 49.

[2] Gore, *Dissertations*, p. 48.

II

THE GOSPELS OF ST. MATTHEW AND ST. LUKE

But if such was the belief of Christians everywhere in the early years of the second century, can we trace the evidence further back? In answering this question, we are brought face to face with the Gospels. But first it must be noted that the positive evidence for such a subject must, in the nature of the case, be much more limited than the evidence for the Resurrection. The Apostles were primarily witnesses of what they themselves had seen. There are two persons, and two only, from whom we could reasonably expect to hear the truth about the mystery of the miraculous

Conception—Mary and Joseph; and when we open the Gospels we have, as everybody knows, two narratives of the Nativity—St. Luke's and St. Matthew's.

(1) St. Luke, in describing the Nativity, is using an Aramaic document. There is a great difference in style between the preface, which is his own, and that of the narrative which follows. It was an Aramaic document (as Godet, Weiss, and Dr. Sanday agree); but more than this, as Bishop Gore has pointed out: "It breathes the spirit of the Messianic hope, before it had received the rude and crushing blow involved in the rejection of the Messiah."[1] The Christology of the passage is pre-Christian: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the

[1] Gore, *Dissertations*, p. 16.

house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end."[1]

"How can all this," Dr. Chase asks, "be the invention of a believer in the Messiahship of Jesus when the Jews had rejected Him, and when the Resurrection and Ascension had raised the conception of His Messiahship to the height of a spiritual and universal sovereignty? The Christology of these passages is a striking proof of their primitive character."[2] It is indeed difficult to see how men can read the *Benedictus* or *Magnificat* without realizing this. Every verse in them is full of Jewish thought and Jewish expressions, such as would have been impossible had they been the inventions of a later date.

That is to say, these two chapters bear traces on the face of them of being what they profess

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[1] St. Luke i. 32, 33.

[2] Chase, *Supernatural Elements in our Lord's Earthly Life.*

to be—a true and genuine account of the human Birth of Jesus Christ, received ultimately from her who alone could be competent to give it —the Virgin-Mother herself. For it must be Mary's account if it is genuine. It is given to us by St. Luke, who tells us that he "had traced the course of all things accurately from the first," and who had gathered information concerning, be it observed, "those things which are most surely believed among the disciples."[1] "It is an account," says Bishop Gore, "which there is no evidence to show the *imagination* of an early Christian capable of producing; for its consummate fitness, reserve, sobriety, and loftiness are unquestionable. What solid reason is there for not accepting it?"[2] It is extraordinarily difficult to imagine that St. Luke, whose accuracy and care have been, in recent years, so severely tested and found

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[1] St. Luke i. 1–4.

[2] Gore, *Dissertations*, p. 18.

not wanting, should have been so careless as to append to his Gospel a spurious account of so momentous an occurrence as the human Birth of our Lord. "Historical accuracy is not a capricious and intermittent impulse," writes Bishop Alexander. "It is a fixed habit of mind, the result of a particular discipline. Historians of the school of the author of the Acts of the Apostles are not men to build a flamboyant portal of romance over the entrance to the austere temple of truth." [1]

(2) The account in St. Matthew's Gospel, if genuine, must have come from Joseph. It is his perplexities which are in question, and Divine intimations are given to him, on three occasions, how to act for the safety of the mother and the Child. The facts which appear in the Third Gospel are clearly prior to those

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[1] Bishop Alexander's *Leading Ideas of the Gospels*, pp. 154, 155.

reported in the First: the Annunciation, Mary's visit to Judaea, her return to Nazareth, precede Joseph's discovery and dream, which follow appropriately upon the Virgin's return. How this account has been preserved in the First Gospel we do not know, for we know so very little about the authorship of that Gospel; but there is nothing at all unreasonable in Bishop Gore's conjecture[1] that St. Joseph (who must have died before the public ministry of our Lord began) left some document detailing the circumstances of the Birth of Jesus Christ; that this document would have been given to Mary (to vindicate, by means of it, when occasion demanded, her own virginity), and that after Pentecost she may have given it to the family of Joseph, the now believing "brethren of the Lord," and from their hands it passed into those of the author of the First Gospel.

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[1] Gore, *Dissertations*, pp. 28, 29.

The Evangelist dwells, as is well known, on the fulfilment of prophecy; but in regard to the particular prophecy of Isaiah, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Immanuel,"[1] it cannot with any probability be said that the prophecy suggested the event; for it does not seem at all likely that there was any Jewish expectation that the Christ should be born of a Virgin. We can understand the prophecy being adduced in order to attest a story already current (this would be wholly after St. Matthew's method); but the prophecy itself, with one's eye on the Hebrew text of Isaiah,[2] could scarcely have led to the fabrication of this particular story about the Messiah's birth. Probably the notion of a Virgin-born Messiah would have been alien to ordinary Jewish ideas.[3] In any case, the Jews did not so interpret the passage, and

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[1] Isa. vii. 14. [2] See Note at the end.
[3] So Dr. Chase.

in fact, to quote Professor Stanton, "It is an instance in which the principle would hold that it is more easy to suppose the meaning of prophetic language to have been strained to fit facts, than that facts should have been invented to correspond with prophetic language."[1] That is to say, it is wholly reasonable and entirely in keeping with the method of the first Evangelist, that when once he had come to know that the Messiah had been born in Bethlehem of a Virgin-Mother, he should have recognized in that wondrous birth the fulfilment of the ancient prophecy of Isaiah. He would then see that whatever primary and lesser fulfilment the words of Isaiah might have, they were only completely fulfilled in Him who is the end of all prophecy, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary.[2]

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[1] Stanton, *Jewish and Christian Messiah*, p. 378.

[2] See Eck, *The Incarnation*, p. 87.

It is hard to bring one's self to speak of the theory put forward by Professor Usener, in which he says that the story of the Virgin-Birth is traceable "to a pagan substratum, and that it must have arisen in Gentile circles."[1] Surely this is wholly contrary to all probability. How can any serious student think that any but Jewish hands could have penned the first two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel? "The story," says Professor Chase, "moves, like that of St. Luke, within the circle of Eastern conceptions; it is pre-eminently and essentially Jewish. Moreover, if time is to be found for the complicated interaction between paganism and Christianity which this theory involves, the First and Third Gospels must be placed at a date which I believe is quite untenable."[2]

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[1] *Encyc. Bibl.*, iii. 3352.

[2] Chase, *Supernatural Elements in our Lord's Earthly Life*, p. 21.

That there are differences and even discrepancies between the two accounts, which are manifestly independent of one another, serves surely to strengthen their witness to the great central fact in which they are at one—that Christ was born of a Virgin-Mother at Bethlehem, in the days of Herod the king.

There appears, then, to be no reason for doubting that in St. Luke's Gospel we have a genuine account derived from Mary herself, and that in St. Matthew's Gospel we have an account left by St. Joseph, "worked over by the Evangelist in view of his predominant interest—that of calling attention to the fulfilments of prophecies."[1] Wherever, therefore, these two Gospels had reached in the second half of the first century, there the story of the Virgin-Birth was known. If the story thus attested by the first and third Evangelists were really a fiction, it is hard indeed

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[1] Gore, *Dissertations*, p. 29.

to believe that it would not have been contradicted by some who were still living, and who knew that the story was different from that which the Mother herself had delivered them. "If," says Dean Alford, speaking of the Third Gospel, "not the mother of our Lord herself, yet His brethren were certainly living; and the universal reception of the Gospel in the very earliest ages sufficiently demonstrates that no objection to this part of the sacred narrative had been heard of as raised by them."[1]

There is no other alternative but to regard both stories as legends *independently circulated* in the ancient Church. "So artificial an explanation would probably have found little favour with scholars if there had been no miracle to suggest it. It is too commonly assumed that evidence which would be good

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[1] *Greek Test.*, vol. i. Prolog. sect. viii. p. 48.

under ordinary circumstances is bad where the supernatural is involved."[1]

Certainly it would seem to be in a high degree improbable that two such accounts as those of the Birth of Jesus Christ which we have in these two Gospels should be the work of forgers; and this improbability is further heightened when we compare them with the legendary accounts of His infancy which were actually current in the early centuries.[2]

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[1] Swete, *Church Congress Report* (1902), p. 163.

[2] See Preface, p. xi.

III

THE SILENCE OF OTHER NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

WHAT are the objections brought against all this evidence? The main objection is the silence of the other writers of the New Testament. To reply—

(1) First, we may surely ask—Why should they mention it? This sort of argument from silence is most precarious. Are we to infer that because there is no mention of the Cross or the Crucifixion in the Epistles of St. James or of St. Jude, that it was unknown to this group of writers, and that they were unaware of the manner of Christ's Death?

"We might much more naturally infer it than we may infer that the Virgin-Birth was unknown because St. James speaks of Christ's Death, and it would therefore have been quite natural for him to speak of the exact mode of it, whereas our Lord's Birth is very seldom referred to in the New Testament, and when it is referred to it would not have aided the argument, or been at all to the point to mention how that Birth was brought about." [1]

Or, because St. John omits all mention of the institution of the Holy Eucharist, are we to suppose that he knew nothing of that Sacrament?

(2) The subject of the Virgin-Birth was not one which the Apostles would be likely to dwell on much. They were above all witnesses of what they had seen and heard. They come before us insisting, therefore, on what

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[1] A. J. Mason, in the *Guardian*, November 19, 1902.

they could themselves personally attest—especially on the Resurrection. They had seen and heard the risen Christ, and the Resurrection was at once a vindication of His Messianic claims, and a manifestation of the dignity of His Person. "This praeternatural fact, the fulfilment of the 'sign'[1] which He had Himself promised, a fact concerning the reality of which they offered themselves as witnesses, would carry with it a readiness to accept a fact like the Virgin-Birth, concerning which the same sort of evidence was not possible."[2]

Belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, belief in His Life, in His Death, in His miracles, in His Resurrection,—these came first, and these were the subjects of Apostolic preaching,[3] and belief in His Virgin-Birth

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[1] St. John ii. 18, 19; St. Matt. xii. 40.

[2] Hall, *The Virgin-Mother*, p. 215.

[3] Acts i. 22; ii. 32.

(ultimately attested by Mary and Joseph) easily followed.

It is instructive in this connection to draw attention to the Acts of the Apostles. As every one knows, it is St. Luke's second volume—the Third Gospel being his first. Now, the Gospel begins with the account of Christ's miraculous Conception and Birth, but there is no reference to these mysteries in the rest of the Gospel or in the Acts. "The reason for the silence in the Acts is the same as for the silence in the subsequent chapters of the Gospel. The Jews had to learn the meaning of the Person of Christ from His own revelation of Himself in His words and works. To have begun with proclaiming the story of His miraculous Birth would have created prejudice and hindered the reception of that revelation.

"Similarly, in the Acts, both Jews and Gentiles had first to learn in the experience of the life of the Church what Jesus had done

and said. Only when they had learned that, was it time to go on and ask who He was and whence He came."[1]

The same point is illustrated by St. Mark's silence. "Had he given any account of our Lord's early years, there would be some ground for pitting him (so to speak) against St. Matthew and St. Luke."[2] But this Gospel begins, as every one knows, with the public ministry of our Lord. It is, in fact, the Gospel which reflects the oral teaching and preaching of St. Peter, and so it begins naturally enough at the point where that Apostle first came in contact with Christ.

(3) If in these writers of the New Testament expressions had been used inconsistent with the Virgin-Birth, it would be a very serious matter: but what are the facts? In the few cases where the Birth is mentioned,

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[1] Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. lxxiv.

[2] Hall, *The Virgin-Mother*, p. 217.

there is nothing said which implies that His Birth in the flesh was analogous in all respects to ours.

Consider St. John's Gospel. The silence on the Virgin-Birth can occasion, one would think, no real difficulty. His Gospel is a supplementary record, and he does not, for the most part, repeat historical statements already made by the other Evangelists. It seems altogether impossible to suppose that St. John was ignorant of the Virgin-Birth. Ignatius, who was Bishop of Antioch quite at the beginning of the second century, and therefore only a few years after the writing of this Gospel, calls it (the Virgin-Birth) a mystery of open proclamation in the Church.[1] Indeed, on any theory of the date of authorship of this Gospel, there is every reason for believing that the Virgin-Birth was, at the time

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[1] *Eph.*, 19.

it was compiled, part and parcel of the tradition of the Church. But when St. John does speak of the Incarnation, in the prologue to his Gospel, when he says, "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,"[1] there is nothing in these words to suggest anything inconsistent with the miraculous story related by St. Matthew and St. Luke. In fact, we may say more than this. We may say that his teaching about the Pre-existent Divine Logos who "was made flesh, and dwelt among us," is felt to be a natural explanation of St. Matthew's narrative as well as of St. Luke's; for, as we shall see, it is the question of the Divine Pre-existence of the Logos on which the *reasonableness* of the doctrine of the Virgin-Birth really turns. St. John does, in fact, in connection with this mystery of the Virgin-Birth, what he does in the case of Baptism and the Holy Eucharist, "he supplies the

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[1] St. John i. 14.

justifying principle—in this case the principle of the Incarnation—without supplying what was already current and well known, the record of the fact."[1]

And it may be added, further, that Mary's word at Cana of Galilee: "They have no wine," and her subsequent order to the servants: "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it,"[2] are a clear indication that in the view of St. John she regarded Him as a miraculous Person, and expected of Him miraculous action.[3] I think that, in regard to the Gospels, their relationship to one another may be summed up in the words of Bishop Alexander: "The fact of the Incarnation is recorded by St. Matthew and St. Luke; it is assumed by St. Mark; the idea which vitalizes the fact is dominant in St. John."[4]

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[1] Gore, *Dissertations*, p. 8, *seq.*

[2] St. John ii. 3, 5. [3] Gore, *loc. cit.*

[4] Bishop Alexander's *Leading Ideas*, Introd., p. xxiv.

Consider next St. Paul's references to the Incarnation :—

"God sent forth His Son, born of a woman."[1] He does not say, "born of human parents."

"His Son our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh."[2]

"Being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men."[3]

These are the passages in which St. Paul refers to the Birth of Jesus Christ. Not one of them is inconsistent with the fact that He was born of a Virgin. But one can say more than this. Every one of these passages infers that He who was born in time had existed before. They either assert or imply a Divine

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[1] Gal. iv. 4. [2] Rom. i. 3.
[3] Phil. ii. 6, 7.

pre-existence. He who was "made in the likeness of men" was already pre-existent in the "form of God," and was, in fact, "equal with God." This being the case, does it not prepare us for the further truth that, when He entered into the conditions of human life, He entered it not in all respects like us? I should mar if I ventured to abbreviate Dr. Mason's admirable words, in which he presses this argument—

"Like causes produce like effects. In similar circumstances, you may expect the same forces to operate in the same way. But when some new force is introduced, you cannot expect the same results. The Birth of Christ, if He is what all the writers of the New Testament believed Him to be, was necessarily unlike ours in that one great respect. We had no existence before we were born, however poets and poetical philosophers may play with the notion. But the New Testament writers believed that He whom we know as Jesus Christ was living with a full, vigorous, personal

life for ages before He appeared in the world as man. They maintained that He was present and active in the making of the world, and immanent in the development of human history, which formed a new beginning at His Birth. They said He was God, the Only Begotten Son of the Eternal Father, who came down from heaven, and voluntarily entered into the conditions of human life. Admit the possibility that they were right, and you will no longer ask that His mode of entrance into our conditions should be in all things like our own. If you acknowledge that Jesus Christ was Divine first and became human afterwards, you cannot but say with St. Ambrose, when you hear that He was born of a Virgin: 'Talis decet partus Deum'—a birth of that kind is befitting to one who is God. We do not—no one ever did—believe Christ to be God because He was born of a Virgin; that is not the order of thought [and we have seen that it was certainly not the order of

Apostolic preaching]; but we can recognize that if He was God, it was not unnatural for Him to be so born. No sound genuine historical criticism can deny that the Virgin-Birth was part of the Creed of Primitive Christianity, and that nothing that can be truly called science can object to that belief, unless it starts with the assumption, which, of course, it cannot even attempt to prove, that Christ was never more than man."[1]

Similarly Professor Stanton: "The chief ground on which thoughtful Christian believers are ready to accept it [the miraculous Conception] is that, believing in the personal indissoluble union between God and man in Jesus Christ, the miraculous Birth of Jesus Christ is the only fitting accompaniment for this union, and, so to speak, the natural expression of it in the order of outward effects."[2]

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[1] *Guardian*, November 19, 1902.

[2] Stanton, *Jewish and Christian Messiah*, p. 376.

IV

OUR LORD AS THE SECOND ADAM

But we may surely go further than this, and say that, in regard to St. Paul, his language as to the Second Adam seems to *necessitate* the Virgin-Birth. In St. Paul's view there are, so to speak, only two men: "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven"[1]—a new starting-point for humanity. This doctrine of the Second Adam, of this fresh start given to the human race by Jesus Christ, would seem to require His Birth of a Virgin, for the Virgin-Birth is bound up with any really Catholic notion of the Incarnation. For what is the Catholic

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[1] 1 Cor. xv. 47.

doctrine of Incarnation? Do we mean by Incarnation that on an already existing human being there descended in an extraordinary measure the Divine Spirit, so that He was by moral association so closely allied to God that He might be called God? Do we mean that some pre-eminent saint, called Jesus, responded with such "signal readiness" to the Divine Voice, "and realized more worthily than any other man 'the Divine idea' of human excellence, so that to Him, by a laxity of phrase not free from profaneness, men might thus ascribe a so-called 'moral Divinity'"? Then, I say quite freely, if that is what we mean, that the Virgin-Birth is, so far as we can see, an altogether gratuitous addition, an unnecessary miracle. That is, so far as I can understand it, the idea of Incarnation entertained by moderns who reject or question the Catholic Faith.

But let me say as clearly as possible that this is not, and never has been, what the Christian

Church means by Incarnation. The New Testament does not tell us of a deified man: no, *we begin with a Divine Person.* "The 'I' in Him, His very self, is Divine, not human; yet has He condescended to take our humanity into union with His Divine Person, to assume it as His own." He who was from all eternity a single Divine Person took upon Him our nature, and was "made man;" and if this be so, what other entrance into our condition is imaginable save that which we confess in the Creed—that He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"? "The Creeds pass immediately from confessing Jesus Christ to be 'the only Son of God' to the fact that He was 'born of the Virgin Mary,' and neither of those articles of the Catholic Faith can be abandoned without disturbing the foundations of the other."[1]

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[1] Swete, *Church Congress Report* (1902), p. 164.

If Christ was born naturally of human parents, He must, one would think, have taken to Himself a human personality; He must have existed in two persons as well as in two natures. But what we are to insist on in thinking of and teaching this mystery is this truth of the single Divine Personality of our Lord. The old Nestorian heresy (with certain important modifications) is being re-suscitated among us. Nestorianism, new and old, begins from below, and speaks of a man who by moral "association" became "Divine;" it speaks, that is to say, of a deified man. The Christian Faith begins from above—it speaks of Him who from all eternity was God, taking upon Him our flesh. He took upon Him our nature, but He did not assume a human personality. He wrapped our human nature round His own Divine Person. On the Nestorian theory, God did but benefit one man by raising him to a unique dignity; on the Catholic theory, He benefitted the race of

men, by raising human nature into union with His Divine Person.

Those who speak, somewhat incautiously surely, of Incarnation, while they deny or question the Virgin-Birth, should be asked to consider what they say and to reflect what their words imply. A man born naturally of human parents but taken up, on account of a wonderfully high moral character, into close union with God, can never differ *in kind* from any saint. He can never benefit the race of men save by way of example. His death can never effect our redemption, for it does not differ in kind from the death of a martyr. Being only a great saint himself, he cannot represent mankind either on the Cross or before the Throne. One man has been assumed into heaven. But this is wholly a different thing from the Faith of Christendom, which is that God has taken human nature into union with His Divine Person, in that nature God died upon the Cross, and in that nature He pleads

before the Throne for the race of men. It is because Christ's Person is Divine, that His life means to us Christians what it does.

"No person," says Hooker, "was born of the Virgin but the Son of God, no person but the Son of God baptized, the Son of God condemned, the Son of God and no other person crucified; which one only point of Christian belief, *the infinite worth of the Son of God*, is the very ground of all things believed concerning life and salvation by that which Christ either did or suffered as man in our behalf."[1] "That," says Bishop Andrewes, "which setteth the high price upon this sacrifice is this, that He which offereth it to God is God."[2]

"Marvel not," says St. Cyril of Jerusalem, "if the whole world has been redeemed; for He who has died for us is no mere man, but

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[1] *Eccl. Pol.*, v. 52. 3.

[2] *Second Sermon on the Passion.*

the Only Begotten Son of God."[1] "Christ," says St. Cyril of Alexandria, "would not have been equivalent [as a sacrifice] for the whole creation, nor would He have sufficed to redeem the world, nor have laid down His life by way of price for it, and poured forth for us His precious Blood, if He be not really the Son, and God of God."[2]

How different is all this from the language of those who would deny or question the Virgin-Birth! With them the Resurrection is denied as a literal fact; the whole meaning of the Atonement as being a real sacrifice for sin, a real propitiation, is eviscerated of its meaning, and is reduced to a moral appeal to man; and finally, we find that whereas Christians have been thinking and speaking of Christ as truly God, who in becoming man "did not

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[1] *Catech.*, xiii. 2.

[2] *De Sancta Trinitate*, dial. A. (quoted in Liddon, *B. L.*, p. 477).

abhor the Virgin's womb," modern writers really mean a very good man who does not, however, differ in kind but only in excellence of degree from any saint; and by Incarnation they mean that moral union which a good man has with God, only illustrated in the case of Christ in an altogether unique degree. If, however, the Incarnation be what Christendom believes it to have been; if the Son of God did really take flesh in the womb of Mary, and became man, not by assuming a human personality, but by assuming human nature, by entering into human conditions of life,—it is indeed difficult to imagine any other way of such an Incarnation save by way of the Virgin-Birth, by which the entail of original sin was cut off, and humanity made a fresh start in the Eternal Person of the Second Adam. And if He is indeed sinless, the sinless Example, the sinless Sacrifice, how could He be otherwise born? Adam, at his fall, passed on to the human race a vitiated nature,

which we all share—a nature biassed in a wrong direction. It descended—this vitiated nature—from father to son to all generations of men. If this entail of original sin was to be cut off, if there was really to be a new Adam, a second start for the human race, how could it be contrived otherwise than by a Virgin-Birth? The Son of Mary was indeed wholly human—completely man—but "in Him humanity inherited no part of that bad legacy which came across the ages from the Fall." [1]

When a modern writer says, "We should not now, *à priori*, expect that the Incarnate Logos would be born without a human father," [2] we may reply that we are hardly in a position to expect anything *à priori* in the matter; but when once we have learnt that this Incarnate Logos was to be the Second Head of the human race—the sinless Son of Man—

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[1] Liddon, *Christmas Sermons*, p. 97.

[2] See *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 88.

and that in Him humanity was to make a fresh start, it is indeed difficult to see how this could be without the miracle of the Virgin-Birth.

I should like to say, in conclusion, that I cannot disguise my conviction that just as in the early days we find no denial of the Virgin-Birth except among those who denied and objected to the principle of the Incarnation (on the ground, apparently, of the essential evil of matter), so, conversely, that the attempt now being made (or the suggestion put forward) to separate the Incarnation and the Virgin-Birth will prove to be an impossibility. Once reject the tradition of the Virgin-Birth, and the Incarnation will go with it. For a few years, indeed, men will use the old language, the word "Incarnation" will be on their lips; but it will be found before long that by that term they do not mean God manifest in human flesh, but they mean a man born naturally

of human parents, who most clearly manifested to men the Christian idea of a perfect human character. Such a conception as this brings no solace to human hearts. No saint, however great, could be our Saviour; no saint could have atoned for sin; and assuredly no saint could be to any of us the source of our new life—the well-spring and fountain of Divine grace.

NOTE

On Isaiah vii. 14

The word for "the Virgin" in the Hebrew text is הָעַלְמָה. It is an ambiguous word, and does not necessarily imply, though it certainly does not necessarily exclude, the idea of virginity. Etymologically it means *puella nubilis*—a maiden of marriageable age.

In four[1] out of six other places in the Old Testament where it is employed, it is used of virgins. Its use in the two other passages[2] is doubtful, but does not with any certainty imply virginity.

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[1] Gen. xxiv. 43; Exod. ii. 8; Ps. lxviii. 25; Cant. i. 3.

[2] Prov. xxx. 19; Cant. vi. 8.

The Septuagint translators, some two hundred years before Christ, translated the word ἡ παρθένος.

Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, in the second century of our era (apparently in order to vitiate the Christian appeal to this passage), translated the word νεᾶνις.

THE END

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